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SUBJECT: Cambodia's National Assembly Approves
Opposition Inclusion in NA Commissions

¶1. (U) Summary. The National Assembly approved on April 7 internal reforms that will allow the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) to chair two of nine National Assembly commissions and to have one deputy Secretary General. The Assembly's internal rules were also modified to improve SRP participation in open debates. Cambodia's PM Hun Sen called the reforms a reflection of election results and national reconciliation. End Summary.

National Assembly Votes for 5-2-2 Formula

¶2. (U) Following the National Assembly's approval to reform the chairmanships of its commissions, Cambodia's PM Hun Sen, who had attended the session, lauded the NA's decision. "The division of the nine commissions is based on the 5-2-2 formula," Hun Sen told reporters outside the National Assembly. "Of the nine commissions, the CPP will chair five, FUNCINPEC two commissions and the SRP two. The division reflects the results of the 2003 elections, the democratic process as well as the national reconciliation."

¶3. (U) Although FUNCINPEC still retains two commissions following the redistribution, the royalist party lost two important commissions - the Commission on Foreign Affairs and Information and the Commission on Interior, Defense, Investigation and anti-Corruption. SRP parliamentarian Son Chhay will chair the Commission on Foreign Affairs that FUNCINPEC MP Princess Norodom Vacheara formerly chaired, and SRP's Yim Sovann will chair the Commission on Interior, Defense and Inquiry that FUNCINPEC MP Monh Saphan had chaired. Monh Saphan will become the deputy chairman of the Assembly's legislative commission, while Princess Vacheara will remain a member of the Foreign Affairs commission. FUNCINPEC's loss of the two commission chairmanships coincided with the NA's approval to add SRP MPs to all nine commissions. Of 108 MPs attending the session chaired by the NA's President Heng Samrin, over 90 MPs cast their secret ballots in favor of the inclusion of additional MPs into each of the commissions. Former National Assembly President Prince Norodom Ranariddh, Princess Norodom Vacheara, Sam Rainsy, and Tioulong Saumura were absent in the session.

¶4. (U) During the same session, the National Assembly voted on the RGC's proposed replacements for two secretaries of state. PM Hun Sen nominated Tep Nonary

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(former governor of Kandal province) as Secretary of State for Interior to replace outgoing Kong Hunthirith, and Sim Son (former governor of Siem Reap) as Secretary of State for Rural Development to replace outgoing Dorn Samuon. Ninety-nine MPs voted in favor of Tep Nonary and 97 in favor of Sin Son. Following the vote, PM Hun Sen reaffirmed that the coalition government of the CPP and FUNCINPEC would continue until 2008 despite some personnel changes. "It is not appropriate for the CPP to give up its coalition partner as the government needs human resources right now," Hun Sen said.

"Though the CPP is able to form a government alone, it is not the CPP's desire to do so. The constitutional amendments on the 50 percent plus one system are aimed to avoid a political deadlock. Despite some reshuffling, the coalition still goes on until 2008."

¶5. (U) The majority of the parliamentarians approved amendments to the NA's internal rules that will allow the Assembly to have additional deputy secretaries general and to remove the restriction that limited the ability of the opposition party to debate issues within the National Assembly. Prior to the change, 13 MPs from any party were needed in order for one party representative to address the Assembly, according to a rule the CPP and FUNCINPEC had approved. Given the SRP membership at 24 members, they could only form a single group for each session and have one voice. The reduction to 10 MPs will allow the SRP to put forward two spokespersons for the opposition view, the same as FUNCINPEC. In addition, based on a compromise between the CPP and the SRP, the SRP will receive a deputy secretary general post within the National Assembly.

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¶6. (SBU) Comment. The National Assembly's action reflects a fulfillment of the Prime Minister's promise

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to Sam Rainsy, allowing the opposition to play a stronger role in the affairs of the National Assembly. With respect to the Assembly's approval of two Secretaries of State (Tep Nonary and Sim Son), both are

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former FUNCINPEC governors recently removed in very public manner by the PM for alleged incompetence. A senior opposition official has told us that their removals were due not to incompetence, but because the CPP wanted to place people in leadership positions in those provinces in order to help lay the groundwork for upcoming elections, and to ensure CPP victories in Kandal and Siem Reap (which are comparatively wealthy provinces). End Comment.

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